



STUDENT CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION HELPS BLM PROTECT HOMES FROM WILDFIRE

This summer the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Palm Springs Field Office hosted two teams of interns from the Student Conservation Association's (SCA) Fire Education Corps. This SCA program received the National Fire Plan Award for Excellence in Community Assistance in January 2003 and is continuing its fire prevention and education work this year.

The interns worked under the learned guidance of Fire Education and Mitigation Officers Chuck Robbins and Clay Howe. The teams were brought in to assist with Fire Prevention and National Fire Plan activities in the South Coast Field Office's territory. The interns were split into two groups, north and south. Siobhan Girling led interns Emily Evans and Steve Maloney in the southern section. Mike Reilly headed up the northern team consisting of interns Mark Blohm and Kate Navarro. GIS Specialist Yoshihiro Ishitsuka worked with both teams providing a much needed technological edge.

Beginning with the Wine & Balloon Festival in Temecula at the beginning of June, the teams provided a fresh and vivacious outlook on fire prevention. They assisted in community outreach events that focused on getting information out to people that live in or near at-risk areas, including the Del Mar Fair, the San Diego Burn Run Expo, the California State fair, and the LA County Fair. Specialized display boards and a game were created to enhance the learning experience. In addition to educating area residents on issues of defensible space and wildfire prevention, the teams worked at the Big Morongo Canyon Wildlife Preserve, the towns of Campo and Julian, Chihuahua Valley, and in the Poppet Flats and Pinyon Flats areas surrounding the San Bernardino National Forest.

At Big Morongo manual labor was provided to widen fire service access to the Preserve's structures and created a wildfire emergency contingency plan using the GPS data they had collected. In Campo and Julian the team conducted over 400 home assessments leading to 83%

compliance with brush regulations.

Chihuahua Valley residents were given a presentation conducted with the help of the local FireSafe council to increase fire safety awareness and facilitate communication amongst invested parties. In the cases of Poppet Flats and Pinyon Flat the team worked in conjunction with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) to create a GIS database coinciding with the directives laid out in the National Fire Plan. The data was collected and put into a form which will assist fire personnel in planning any potential evacuations and protecting the communities' assets in case of an emergency.



SCA Fire Education Team Leaders Mike Reilly and Siobhan Girling pose with friend Smokey Bear

The efforts of these teams were received with high regard and thanks by the local populations. The team members returned to their respective universities in August. The teams' leaders will remain on, continuing to educate people and facilitate communication on the potential dangers of wildfire until early 2005.

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